DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 589 IR 055 042

AUTHOR Lewis, Charles
TITLE Exploring Context in the Viewing of Local TV News.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 13p.; In: Visual Literacy in the Digital Age: Selected Readings from the Annual Conference of the International Visual Literacy Association (25th, Rochester, New York, October 13-17, 1993); see IR 055 055.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Patterns; Beliefs; *Broadcast Journalism; *Context Effect; Ethnography; *Family (Sociological Unit); *Interaction; Local Issues; Marriage; *News Reporting; Pilot Projects; Recreational Activities; *Television Viewing; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Local News

ABSTRACT

This pilot study examines how a married couple with a small child integrates a 10 p.m. television news program into their weekday lives. The research focuses on how patterns of behaviors extend into television viewing, rather than how television programming influences beliefs, values, and behaviors. Ethnographic methods employed in the observation of this family indicate that getting the news is not an important reason for the husband and wife to watch local television news each week night. Viewing the news is a ritualistic activity for them that signifies the end of the workday and serves as a signal to go to bed. The news gives them a context for conversation and helps them interact. It is merely an entertaining part of their nightly pattern of relaxation. The news broadcasters and their personalities and presentations reinforce a sense of belonging to the community. The television news is a taken-for-granted natural part of their world. (Contains 33 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 370 589

Exploring Context in the Viewing of Local TV News

by Charles Lewis

Mass Communications Institute
Box 8400, MSU Box 39
Mankato State University
Mankato, MN 56002-8400

IR055042

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Alice Walker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Exploring Context in the Viewing of Local TV News

Charles Lewis

Introduction

According to reception theorists, communication always occurs within particular institutional, historical and cultural contexts. Thus, meanings generated through communication do not simply exist in "words on a page or dots on a television screen, but come ... about as a result of a confrontation between viewer and image" (Allen, 1987: 5). This pilot study addresses some of the contextual elements that are a part of communication.

In the contextualist framework, the *process* of generating meanings and the *context* in which this happens should be central to communication research (Carey, 1989: 18). Such an approach is theoretically supported by much scholarship. In general, this includes research and theory concerning the formation of a sense of self through interactions in particular contexts, espoused through the years by such scholars as Goffman (1959, 1979). Specifically, such an approach is supported by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which postulates a family member is the product of the reciprocal interaction of self, behavior and environment.

This pilot study, based on observations and interviews conducted in 1989 when the author was a doctoral student, focuses on how a married couple with a small child integrate the 10 p.m. television news program into their weekday lives. This research focuses on how patterns of behaviors *extend into* television viewing, rather than how TV programming influences beliefs, values and behaviors.

No doubt television is a powerful force in American life. More than 98 percent of American households have at least one television set, with most families have two or more sets. A majority of American homes now have cable and a VCR, and a television set is on in the average American household more than seven hours each day (Television Bureau of Advertising, Inc., and A. C. Nielson, reprinted in DeFleur and Dennis, 1991: 209-211, 218).

In following Glaser and Strauss's (1967) strategies for generating theory in qualitative research, the hypothesis here is that television can be strongly linked to significant social processes within the home. This micro study is not intended to prove the prevalence of certain interactions or other behaviors as they relate to TV. The ethnographic data and analysis presented here are meant to provide the basis for more theory and research in understanding television in home life.

This study adds to emerging critical, qualitative audience research and theorizing, which explore issues of ideology and hegemony (See Lindlof, 1988;

IR055042

Jensen, 1987; Wren-Lewis, 1983; Liebes and Katz, 1990; Morley, 1986; and Ang, 1985). It also adds to pluralist studies, which usually do not address issues of societal power relations like critical studies, but instead explore interpersonal patterns of behavior in relation to media use (See Lemish, 1985, 1982; Wolf, Meyer and White, 1982; Lull, 1980a, 1980b, 1982a, 1982b; Bryce, 1980; Davis and Abelman, 1983; Brody and Stoneman, 1983; Bryce and Leichter, 1983; and Goodman, 1983).

Method

This micro study employs ethnographic methods. A young, suburban couple who have a small child were observed and interviewed. The author first met the couple in 1980 during undergraduate school. Since then the author and couple did not remain in close touch, but were still friends. In 1989 as part of a doctoral study project, the author spent two evenings observing the couple: Tuesday, Feb. 7, from 9 to 11 p.m., and Thursday, Feb. 9, from 9 to 11 p.m. On Saturday, Feb. 11, the author interviewed the couple. This paper begins with background material concerning the family and their television viewing behaviors. Next observations are detailed, followed by an analysis of the observations and the results of the interview.

Description and Analysis

Jay and Glenda Smith, their 2-year-old son, Alex, and their terrier, Mickey, live in a pleasant Brown rambler situated in a northern suburb of middle-class affluence in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area of Minnesota. (Pseudonyms are used for all family members.)

Although the Smiths do not have one, the swimming pools of several neighbors can be seen from Jay and Glenda's rear patio sliding door. Theirs is a quiet neighborhood of responsible, middle-class, predominantly white, working, urban Minnesotans — a good place, according to the Smiths, to raise their child. Jay and Glenda each appear to be relatively happy, fulfilled, bright and healthy individuals. Glenda enjoys conversation and is willing to speak her mind on most topics. Jay is generally more reserved than Glenda. He is often quiet, but he appears to be paying close attention to any conversation taking place.

Both Jay and Glenda were reared on farms near small communities averaging 5,000 inhabitants. They met while attending college and were married in 1982. Both hold bachelor's degrees — Jay majored in psychology and mass communication; Glenda majored in elementary education. Jay, 30, is a senior social worker for a government agency. Glenda, 29, manages the customer service department of a retail business; she has eight employees working under her management. Each has a 20-minute drive to work each day. Both say they enjoy their work despite the near-frantic pace of their daily lives created largely by job responsibilities.

Jay and Glenda rise at 6 a.m. each weekday in order to prepare themselves for work and, of more importance, to prepare their 2-year-old boy for the day. Alex is cleaned, dressed, fed and taken to a day care operation only a few blocks away from their home, where, according to Glenda, he "watches way too much television." Glenda, who picks up Alex on her way home from work, usually arrives home between 5 and 5:30 p.m. Jay arrives soon after Glenda and Alex.

According to Glenda, it is at this point the family's television is turned on: "Jay controls the TV set — I don't touch things. ... If I turn the set off in the evening, Jay will say, 'what did you do that for?'" Jay did not deny this. He said he usually controls the television with a remote — if he can find the remote, which often disappears for lengthy periods thanks to Alex or the dog, Mickey.

The Smiths have only one television set, a color set about 10 years old connected to the local cable service. It, on a stand along with a VCR, anchors a

corner of the living room. Their living room is carpeted and contains comfortable, fairly new furniture. Most of the sitting spaces in the room face the television set and picture window, apparently the two most visually stimulating points of the room for the family.

The Smiths both agreed they spend most of their leisure hours in the living room. They said the television is almost always turned on when they are in this room, although they may be involved in activities other than viewing the set, such as playing with Alex. The Smiths do have a den, but said they spend little time there.

The second most-occupied space of the house for family activities is the kitchen/dining-room area. Meals are eaten in the dining room, and the television is turned off during meals. Before Alex was born, Jay and Glenda used to eat meals in front of the television frequently. "Since Alex we try really hard to make quality family time at the table," Glenda said. Alex becomes too distracted when the television is on — he will leave the dining-room table for the living room and the television if he hears programs or commercials with which he is familiar.

So, the set is off during meals. Interestingly, Jay and Glenda agreed that if they had another television, it would be placed on the kitchen counter where it could be seen from the dining room. They say this second set would probably be turned on during meals. Neither appeared concerned that this might affect "quality family time at the table." But perhaps this is a reason they do not purchase another television — they know they would put it in a place where it would negatively affect the family communion during meals.

It is interesting they think they could not control their viewing behavior for the sake of "quality family time." Like the narcotic addict, if the drug is available, it is very difficult to avoid ingesting it. Television is apparently an important component of the Smiths' home life. They recognize this and do not appreciate the powerful role of television in their lives.

Jay and Glenda agreed they have the television set turned on at least three to four hours each evening during the work week. They said on weekends the set is usually only turned on for sporting events. While discussing this during the interview, Glenda exclaimed: "This is embarrassing — it's terrible when you start thinking about what you do. God, we watch too much TV." Jay and Glenda enjoy much of the new entertainment programming that targets the baby-boomer generation: Shows such as *thirtysomething*, *The Wonder Years*, *Almost Grown* and *Roseanne* are among Jay's favorites; Glenda enjoys the same shows as Jay except for *The Wonder Years*, which she does not appreciate because of one episode that depicted children drinking and smoking.

They both enjoy broadcasts of sporting events, especially baseball. Jay watches public television quite often with Alex, who likes to watch nature programs. According to Glenda, Alex enjoys network/cable commercial advertisements more than anything — he sings along with the soundtracks of several commercials.

Jay and Glenda agreed that their pattern of weeknight television use varies little. As stated earlier, Jay turns on the television after arriving home from work around 5:30 p.m. Neither Jay nor Glenda spend much time watching the television from this point until they shut it off during supper. Instead, they listen to it while preparing supper. They say that during this pre-supper period the set is always tuned to local and national news broadcasts — never to reruns or other entertainment programming. Next comes supper with the set usually turned off.

After supper, while the dishes are washed, Jay turns the set back on. Again, they listen to it from the kitchen and dining room rather than watch it. Alex, however, is probably at this point in the living room watching the set. They say it is about 7:30

p.m. before chores are completed and all family members are in the living room. For the next hour the three of them watch television and/or interact through use of games, puzzles, horseplay, etc. The television usually remains on no matter what the form of interaction.

At 8:30 Glenda puts Alex to bed. Jay and Glenda agreed their nightly "alone time" is from 9 p.m. to about 10:30 p.m., and it is usually spent in the living room. During this period the television is on. They said they almost always watch a local television news broadcast before going to bed.

It was during this late-evening period of "alone time" that Jay and Glenda's television viewing behavior was observed. The author arrived for the Tuesday observation session just before 9 p.m. Both seemed to adjust to the author's presence in a matter of minutes. Both were dressed in sweatsuits. Jay promptly settled into the chair nearest the television set while Glenda wrapped herself in a blanket and sat on the couch with her feet up on the coffee table.

From 9 to 10 p.m. the couple and author chatted while *thirtysomething* was on the television. While Glenda appeared more interested in conversing, it was obvious Jay would rather be watching the show, which, according to Glenda, is one of his favorites. He was trying to follow the show and engage in conversation. Towards the end of *thirtysomething*, the author disengaged from much conversation and simply observed. By 10 p.m. it appeared they felt quite comfortable with having an observer in their living room.

After *thirtysomething* the usual teaser came on for the KSTP-TV (Channel 5) news, which is the ABC affiliate in the Twin Cities. Jay switched the channel to KARE-TV (Channel 11), the NBC affiliate, saying he didn't like the lead story advertised on KSTP's teaser — it was about the "comeback of big cars," which Jay considered a "silly" lead story. He also told Glenda that he wanted to watch Channel 11 because he saw a KARE news crew that day in the government center where he works.

He said there were police stationed on every floor of the center that day, and he didn't know why but had heard a rumor that the police had lost a prisoner in the building. The KARE introductory graphics and sound began with neither Jay nor Glenda paying much attention. Jay was playing with the dog while Glenda was adjusting the blanket around herself. When the lead story (about a local bank scandal) began, Jay's attention turned from the dog to the television. He watched rather intently, looking like an attentive student in a college lecture hall. Glenda also began watching, but appeared more relaxed than Jay.

Towards the end of the first story Glenda got off the couch and went to the bathroom, saying she needed to brush her teeth. The second story was about jury deliberation in the trial of a man accused of murdering a woman. Jay continued to be glued to the television and began to make noises such as "hmmmm," indicating he found the story interesting. Glenda came to the hallway entrance, toothbrush in mouth, and watched intently. Jay soon began commenting on the story — addressing his comments to no one in particular — he appeared to be talking to the television. When a video clip of the prosecuting attorney was presented, Jay said: "He doesn't look like a prosecuting attorney; he looks like one of the transient witnesses!"

Meanwhile, Glenda finished brushing her teeth and was back on the couch under the blanket before the murder trial story ended. The couple missed the third story presented because they began a discussion based on the second story. Part of the story dealt with the murdered women's children and what had become of them. Glenda caustically commented that the children were probably better off since

their mothers were often in bars picking up strangers (implying they were not good mothers). Jay said he thought she was being judgmental and heartless.

The next story they paid attention to concerned the rejection of a congressional pay hike. This also led to a debate/ discussion between the two. Jay thought they deserved the pay hike while Glenda did not. The author intervened at this point and asked if they were involving themselves in these discussions somehow because of his presence. Both immediately said they were not — they said they enjoyed these playful arguments over issues, and that this was a very common occurrence for them while watching the 10 p.m. news. It was as if the news were the moderator of discussions that helps them "connect" after a day of physical and mental separation from one another.

Neither appeared to pay much attention to any of the commercials between any of the segments. They usually used the segments of commercials as intermission periods. Jay brushed his teeth during the first commercial segment. Glenda let the dog out during the second commercial segment and back in during the third. During the interview they said that although they do not appreciate commercials, they do appreciate the intermissions made possible by commercial breaks.

Glenda considers commercials "a rude interruption" and resents the apparent hold they have on Alex, who is fascinated by them. During the broadcast Jay commented on commercials only once. He noted how so many advertisements were about farm products; he figured market research must show a lot of farmers watch the show.

Interest in the broadcast was most keen during the weather. Both paid close attention to the forecast. Jay tended to laugh out loud during the banter accompanying the weather; Glenda smiled. It appears Jay is the family's "opinion leader." Glenda is by no means subservient to Jay — she certainly speaks her mind and is obviously a dynamic individual, but Jay appears to have the most authority in the family.

For example, he usually controlled the television through use of the remote. His role as opinion leader was also indicated as conversation was again prompted by the broadcast when the KARE meteorologist mentioned the temperatures in Minnesota's Red River Valley communities. Glenda asked Jay if that would be a good place to vacation next summer. Jay replied that it would not — that it was "nothing but boring farmland."

After the weather, attention to the broadcast lagged significantly. Glenda appeared to be falling asleep on the couch. Jay had his chin cupped in his hand. They conversed about packing lunches for work. As a whole, the news show appeared to be signifying to them that another workday would soon begin and preparations must be made. At this point — right before the sports segment — Jay said he would turn the television off and go to bed because there "are no good sports this time of year."

Before leaving, the author asked if, other than not turning the set off after the weather, they would have behaved differently if alone. Glenda said they might "have been more affectionate," such as sitting by one another on the couch. Other than that they both agreed it was a "normal" evening.

Thursday night was chosen for a second observation because programming would be affected by President's Bush's speech concerning the national budget. Because of the speech, the 10 p.m. local news shows began about 20 minutes late. The author wanted to see how this disruption in the normal pattern would affect viewing behaviors, and arrived at about 9 p.m. when Bush's speech was nearing the end. Jay and Glenda were watching the speech on KSTP.

A conversation about the recent presidential election ensued so that the couple missed the end of the speech and the following network news analysis. Following the speech the program *Dynasty* was presented, out of its usual 8 p.m. slot. It began about 9:20. Glenda was delighted to see the show, which she usually misses because they watch a show on another station at 8 p.m. Thursday. Jay made it clear he did not care for *Dynasty*.

What resulted was just the opposite of Tuesday's experience. This time Jay conversed with me while Glenda had a difficult time trying to divide her attention between the show and the conversation. They were both seated on the couch, dressed in the same sweatsuits, and Glenda was again wrapped in the blanket with her feet on the table.

This time they did not switch to KARE for the news show, although the remote was near Jay. KSTP's news show did not begin until nearly 10:30. During the introduction Glenda commented on how the meteorologist looked "like a little boy." This began a discussion between Jay and Glenda in which they analyzed the presentations of the weather by the various "weather personalities" on the four local stations' news shows. Because of this, they missed most of the lead story.

Soon after the discussion, during the second story, Glenda got up and went to brush her teeth. A few minutes later she appeared at the hallway entrance and said she was going to bed, which she then did. Jay continued to watch the news and commented to me how he thought KSTP's news was "sensational" and "too dramatic" after viewing a segment in which a 911 phone call was replayed as part of the narrative of a hard-news story.

During the commercial breaks, Jay brushed his teeth and let the dog out and back in. At about 10:40, after the weather was presented, Jay shut the television off with the remote and said it was time for bed. Jay explained that during the baseball and football seasons he always watched through the sports reporting, but rarely to the very end of a broadcast, unless it was about something of particular interest to him. He said Glenda often went to bed right after the weather forecast.

It was interesting Jay stuck to his habitual pattern of viewing despite the late hour, but Glenda was more aware of "real time," not "broadcast time." She went to bed at her normal time even though the news was only beginning.

Jay did not go to bed although he appeared quite tired. Perhaps this loosely indicates the level of control the television has over Jay's home life — the television dictates activity. They both agreed in the interview that Jay enjoys and watches more television than Glenda, whether news or entertainment programming, which could be why Jay generally controls television viewing.

From these observations and Saturday's interview, several conclusions concerning the relationship between the 10 p.m. television news and Jay and Glenda Smith were arrived at. First of all, they do not watch television news programs in order to become better informed about events, although being informed is sometimes a sketchy byproduct of watching — Jay said they sometimes get "headlines" of breaking news events from television. The only information they feel they truly need from the broadcast is the weather forecast. Glenda said she needs to know whether she should "plug the car in or not," etc.

Both, however, are concerned about being adequately informed about current events. Jay said he wants to know "the news" because "otherwise we'd be living in a vacuum and not know what's going on." Jay mentioned how he still values his journalism training in an undergraduate university mass communication program even though he has not used it professionally. He implied he would feel guilty if he were not a consumer of news.

Glenda brought up two interesting points concerning why one should be informed about news: She considers news an aid in helping people form values and opinions. "I think news helps you develop what you stand for," she said. She also said news "helps me socially ... it helps me get through the day." She went on to explain how she uses a knowledge of current affairs as a basis for socializing at work because "news is often a topic of conversation at work."

The Smiths subscribe to two newspapers, the daily Minneapolis *StarTribune* and a weekly suburban. They claim to thoroughly read the *StarTribune* every morning before work. Both agree they get most of their working knowledge of the day's "news" from the newspaper, not television. When asked which medium they would believe if a television news show and a newspaper presented different accounts of the same event, they both immediately said they would believe the newspaper because newspaper news is presented "in more depth" and "they (newspaper personnel) have more time to check the facts."

When asked whether they thought local television news informed them well, they both emphatically replied that it did not, saying TV news is "sensational" and "overly dramatic." They also make a strong inferential interpretation of the purpose of television news shows. When asked what they thought the purpose of television news was, they replied:

Glenda: "Prestige."
Jay: "Ratings."
Glenda: "They're doing it for their own personal benefit. They're doing it for their benefit, not our benefit — for profit."
Jay: "For the advertising dollar. Their top priority is not to give us quality newscasts; it's to get people to watch them."

So, although they apparently do not see much quality in television news and suspect that the corporate authors of the news shows are simply interested in profit, they still listen to the news while fixing supper and watch the 10 p.m. news before going to bed. Television news is a part of their lives, but their reasons for consuming it obviously have relatively little to do with "getting the news." For them, the 10 p.m. news first of all provides a context for them to connect with one another — to talk, to be aware of one another. Their behavior during the news shows reinforces this conclusion.

They appear to use the presentations of news as a stimulus for discussions in which they outline to one another their knowledge and opinions concerning the subject at hand — knowledge they claim to build through reading the "in-depth" newspaper. They often engage in this activity of "playful argumentation" while seated close to one another. In short, television news at 10 p.m. helps provide a context for intimacy.

In addition, viewing the 10 p.m. news appears to be an evening ritual for them that signifies the end of the workday. Again, this has nothing to do with becoming informed. They said in the interview they rarely watch the 10 p.m. news on the weekends. In fact, they do not normally watch any news on the weekend, but they rarely miss the news on weekdays. To them, the 10 p.m. report is analogous to a period at the end of a sentence — the sentence being the workday. Glenda put it best: "It (the 10 p.m. news) is an *alarm* — it's an alarm to go to bed. If I don't go to bed after the news, boy, I'm never going to be able to get up in the morning."

The news shows at 10 p.m. during weeknights, then, seem to signify the end of their short "unwinding period" from 9 to 10:30 p.m. The news show is the last stage of their weeknight pattern of relaxation — it provides a context for playful interaction between the two; it ultimately is the "alarm" to go to bed. It also serves another purpose as part of their

pattern of relaxation — it is entertaining for them and often simply makes them feel better about life in general.

The news show, like the entertainment programming presented before it, offers a video escape from reality (which is ironic, considering the news is supposed to be depicting reality). For example, Jay, the former mass communication major, said he would watch a public television local news show if one were offered at 10 p.m. Glenda immediately responded to his statement with: "Well, I wouldn't watch it (a PBS local news show) — I wouldn't find it entertaining enough."

Although Jay professed a desire for what he would consider more quality-oriented local television news, his viewing behavior and several comments during the interview suggested he feels much the same as Glenda concerning the 10 p.m. news — he would miss the entertainment inherent in it. He is most interested in two presentations in the newscasts: weather and sports. The weather forecast truly is giving him vital information.

Sports, however, is a different "story," so to speak. Sports news — during the baseball and football seasons especially — is simply a continuation of coverage of the sporting events he probably watched on television or saw live. Viewing sporting events is an important form of entertainment for him. Like many, Jay wades through the "news" in the program in order to get one last bit of entertainment from the sports segment of the news show.

More indications of the "entertainment/feel good" factors emerged during the interview. When asked which news show they watched most and why, their answers differed significantly. Jay said they watched KARE most often; Glenda said KSTP. They agreed they rarely watch KMSP-TV (an independent) or WCCO-TV (the CBS affiliate). Glenda said WCCO news is "quite boring" since a particular female anchor left. Glenda equated personalities with an interesting show, a theme they then discussed at length.

In fact, they had little to say concerning story structures, use of video clips, graphics, or reporting skills, although they were asked about each. But they did have many comments concerning the personalities, who *were* the shows as far as they were concerned. For example, both said they like KARE much better than KSTP, although they watch KSTP quite frequently. Glenda and Jay both expressed a deep disgust with KSTP news at 10 p.m. entirely based on personalities:

Glenda: "Like that Randall Carlisle (a male anchor) — he seems like the biggest dupe from nowhereland. And, you know, Stan Turner (a former male anchor) was a nice guy — I liked him. I don't like how they treat their people there (KSTP). I used to like Cyndy Brucato (a former female anchor), and they just ditched her. I don't like how they treat their people so I don't like their newscast."

Jay: "And that Mark Curtis on Channel 5 sports — they bring this guy in from Phoenix right before the World Series (1987 Series) and he's terrible. The guy's here for a week and all of the sudden he is the world's biggest Twins fan and knows all there is about the team."

Glenda was upset that the corporate owners could be so callous when dealing with anchors. She spoke as if Cyndy Brucato and Stan Turner were old friends she knew well. Jay was upset that Mark Curtis, who was obviously *not a member of the community*, could be so pretentious when it came to the Minnesota Twins. Glenda implied a similar disruption of the sense of community in her comment about Carlisle — the "dupe from nowhereland."

Still, they both agreed they watch KSTP quite often. Why? Glenda said it is the most entertaining because it has the most sensational and dramatic story presentations. It's "showy," according to Glenda. Jay said they enjoy criticizing the

show and its anchors. Jay said it is similar to when "you watch a grade B movie just to get a laugh — just to see how poorly it is done. We like to rip Channel 5 apart." Thus, the show is not only entertaining for them, but provides them with a forum for interacting.

They both most appreciate KARE news at 10 p.m. for two reasons: First, personalities again. Glenda considers the personalities on KARE news to be "a little more relaxed — more the kind of people I could invite into my home and feel comfortable with." Their second reason concerned the type of stories presented and the style of presentation. Jay says he goes to bed "feeling a little better after watching Channel 11." He considers KARE to have "a little less blood-and-guts stories" than the other news shows, and KARE "will more often give you a little candy-coated sweet story about something." Glenda added that she is drawn to KARE because they have many stories that are about "how government or religion hurt somebody — hurt the common person." She said she can "relate to that because it shows how justice has been served in some way."

Conclusion

"Getting the news" apparently is not an important reason for Jay and Glenda to watch local television news each weeknight. Viewing the 10 p.m. news is a ritualistic activity for them that signifies the end of the workday — an "alarm to go to bed." Certain activities always take place at that point in the evening — teeth are brushed, the dog is let out and in, the news is watched. The news helps them interact — to redevelop a closeness dissipated by a busy day by providing a context for conversation. The news is simply entertaining for them — part of their nightly pattern of relaxation.

The news shows' presentations and their personalities reinforce a sense of belonging to the community for Jay and Glenda, so much so that they resent "intruders" in shows (and thus their community) such as Randall Carlisle and Mark Curtis. And the news simply makes them feel better about the day and their lives. They know KARE is "candy-coated" but it doesn't matter because it makes them feel good. They know they can "get the news" from the newspaper.

Like the work of Lull (1980a, 1982a), Wolf, Meyer and White (1982), Morley (1986), Palmer (1986) and Press (1989), this study indicates television is more than a transmitter of entertainment and information because TV is more than its messages. The medium and its technology serve as one focal point for family rituals. This study indicates that the complexities that make up family behaviors are affected by the use of the television. Thus, for those families who regularly use television, it is likely the medium is an integral part of the complex, day-to-day construction and negotiation of meanings.

It is fair to conclude television is such a part of this couple's existence that it has become a natural part of their world. Television and its viewing are taken for granted by the Smiths. The TV is something to use as a tool in enhancing interpersonal roles and relations. Therefore, television is not something that is outside of people's lives — the TV is inside the family, so to speak. This could reinforce television's role as a dispenser of sanctioned views of reality.

The "preferred meanings" (Hall, 1980) of a television program — those that display ideologies that benefit the dominant in society — are more likely to be unquestionably accepted by viewers if the medium is seen as a natural part of family life. In short, an "attributional" understanding of television messages is reinforced (Messaris and Gross, 1977).

REFERENCES

Allen, R. (1987). "Talking about Television." In R. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of Discourse*. (pp. 1-16). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination.* New York: Routledge

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Brody, G. and Z. Stoneman. (1983). "The Influence of Television Viewing on Family Interactions." *Journal of Family Issues 4: 2,* 329-348.

Brody, G. Z. Stoneman and A. Sanders. (1980). "Effects of Television Viewing on Family Interactions: An Observational Study." *Family Relaions 29,* 216-220.

Bryce, J. (1980). "Television and the Family: An Ethnographic Approach." Ed.D. dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Bryce, J. and H. Leichter. (1983). "The Family and Television: Forms of Mediation." *Journal of Family Issues 4: 2,* 309-328.

Carey, J. (1989). *Communication as Culture.* Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Davis, D. and R. Abelman. (1983). "Families and Television: An Application of Frame Analysis Theory." *Journal of Family Issues 4: 2,* 385-404.

DeFleur, M. and E. Dennis. (1991). *Understanding Mass Communication.* 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Glaser, B. and A. Strauss. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.* New York: Aldine.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* New York: Anchor Press.

Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender Advertisements.* New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Goodman, I. (1983). "Television's Role in Family Interaction." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 4: 2,* 405-424.

Hall, S. (1980). "Encoding/Decoding." In S. Hall et al. (Eds.), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79.* (pp. 128-138). London: Hutchinson.

Jensen, K. (1987). "Qualitative Audience Research: Toward an Integrative Approach to Reception." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication 4: 1,* 21-36.

Lemish, D. (1982). "The Rules of Viewing Television in Public Places." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 26,* 757-781.

Lemish, D. (1985). "Soap Opera Viewing in College: A Naturalistic Inquiry. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 29,* 275-293.

Liebes, T. and E. Katz. (1990). *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Lindlof, T. (1988). "Media Audiences as Interpretive Communities." In J. Anderson (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook.* (pp. 81-107, Vol. II). NewBury Park, CA: Sage.

Lowery, S. and M. Defleur. (1988). *Milestones in Mass Communication Research.* 2nd ed. New York: Longman, Inc.

Lull, J. (1980a). "Family Communication Patterns and the Social Use of Television." *Communication Research 7,* 319-334.

Lull, J. (1980b). "The Social Uses of Television." *Human Communication Research 6: 3*, 196-209.

Lull, J. (1982a). "How Families Select TV Programs: A Mass Observational Study." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 26: 4*, 801-811.

Lull, J. (1982b). "A Rules Approach to the Study of Television and Society." *Human Communication Research 9*, 3-16.

Messarius, P. and L. Gross. (1977). "Interpretations of a Photographic Narrative by Viewers in Four Age Groups." *Studies in Visual Communication 4: 2*, 99-111.

Morley, D. (1980). *The Nationwide Audience*. London: British Film Institute.

Morley, D. (1986). *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. New York: Routledge.

Palmer, P. (1986). *The Lively Audience: A Study of Children Around the TV Set*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Press, A. (1989). "Class and Gender in the Hegemonic Process: Class Differences in Women's Perceptions of Television Realism and Identification with Television Characters." *Media, Culture and Society 11*, 229-251.

Stoneman, Z. and G. Brody. (1983). "Family Interactions During Three Programs." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 4: 2*, 349-365.

Wolf, M., T. Meyer and C. White. (1982). "A Rules-Based Study of Television's Role in the Construction of Social Reality." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 26*, 813-829.

Wren-Lewis, J. (1983). "The Encoding/ Decoding Model: Criticisms and Redevelopments for Research on Decoding." *Media, Culture and Society 5: 2*, 179-197.